



# U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

## Region 7 - Alaska

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*News*

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### **Zirkle Carries National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Celebrations Along the Iditarod Trail**

Iditarod racer Aliy Zirkle will leave for Nome on March 1 with a special message about the National Wildlife Refuge System's Centennial. Thanks to a generous donation of gear by the Alaska Natural History Association, Aliy, her dogs and sled will all be sporting the "Blue Goose," the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System, in celebration of the System's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

On March 14, 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt created the first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island, Florida. A century later, that seed has grown into a national network of wildlife habitats, including almost 100 million acres on 540 national wildlife refuges. Sixteen of the largest (and wildest!) of America's refuges are located here in Alaska.

Aliy began running dogs in Bettles, population 35, while working as a biologist for nearby Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge. She started with a 6-dog team, which she used to travel to local villages and for trips into the Brooks Range. When she left Bettles four years later, Aliy moved to Two Rivers, outside of Fairbanks, and began to get serious about racing sled dogs. Today, Skunk's Place Kennel, which she manages with her sister Kaz, has almost 50 dogs. The kennel attracted worldwide attention when Aliy won the Yukon Quest in 2000, becoming the first woman to win this difficult event.

Aliy remembers her rookie Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in 2001 as a difficult, but rewarding, experience. Her team was plagued with an illness called European Kennel Cough, which was not effectively prevented by available U.S. vaccinations. Although this resulted in the trip taking longer than she had anticipated, Aliy was still able to bring 8 dogs across the finish line in 33<sup>rd</sup> place. In March of last year Aliy was back in Anchorage to start the 2002 Iditarod. Her second trip to Nome cut more than 24 hours from her time for the 2001 race.

A photo of Aliy, and additional information, can be found on the web at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/>. (Simply click on "Refuge Centennial Countdown" under "Hot Issues.") Additional photographs will be available at the same location after the March 1 Ceremonial Start in Anchorage.

As Aliy journeys towards Nome on the Iditarod Trail this year, we can reflect on the "distance" that both she and the National Wildlife Refuge System have traveled. Cheer for Aliy in Anchorage and along the trail as she helps launch the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial in Alaska, and adds new achievements to what is already an impressive racing career!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign

governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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*For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at  
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